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Chairman: Mr. Mernier . . . . . (Belgium)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: We are grateful to have Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, Mr. Jin Yongjian, and Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, with us today. I warmly welcome them.

(*spoke in French*)

In accordance with its agenda, the First Committee will today begin its general debate on all disarmament and international security items. Allow me, however, first to make the traditional Chairman's opening statement.

At the risk of repeating myself, I should like warmly to welcome everyone here. I should also like to thank all delegations for the honour bestowed on my country and on me by my election to the chairmanship of the First Committee.

The fifty-third session of the General Assembly has begun its work in an atmosphere which in many ways should promote disarmament and international security. The long-awaited reduction of the nuclear threat over recent years has been accompanied by an increase in cultural and trade exchanges. This can only advance knowledge and respect for each other, the only genuine bases for peace.

We need to recall, however, that at the dawn of the First World War quite a few commentators believed war was impossible because of economic interdependence. Belgium is more aware than others of the value of such predictions. It knows that peace is not a random fact of history but, rather, the result of conscious and tenacious work carried out by men of goodwill. Backed by that conviction, my country has committed itself with determination to disarmament. A State party to all the major treaties governing both weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons, it will continue to follow that policy as long as it is possible and necessary.

Disarmament is certainly a difficult undertaking, with complex and varied aspects. It can only be implemented stage by stage, sometimes following a rather narrow path. What is at stake, however, allows no room for weakness. Nothing must hamper our dynamism, nothing must dilute our confidence, which should be strengthened by the considerable progress already made. Significant agreements and a broad consensus on future objectives are essential parts of this. Without going into the detail of all the positive recent developments in the area of concern to us, I believe it useful to give a rapid review, beginning with weapons of mass destruction.

Some might think that a priori this is the least promising subject and that the past year, for example, has seen quite a few regrettable events. The relative inertia in the START process, the continued existence of considerable nuclear arsenals and the recent nuclear tests in South Asia would seem to support that view, all the more so since we should be concerned about certain countries' lack of respect for international safeguards agreements and about suspicions regarding the development in various places of long-range ballistic missiles.

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The difficulties in establishing a total ban on nuclear explosions and on the production of fissile material for military purposes could also justify a certain gloom. It would of course be ludicrous to deny the magnitude of the challenges thus facing us.

We would be wrong, however, to overly stress pessimism and to forget the important treaties that already govern weapons of mass destruction, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) or those banning chemical and biological weapons. The continued progress made in these treaties towards universality is in itself a source of great satisfaction. Here I should like to hail the recent accession of Brazil to the NPT, which brings to 187 the number of States parties to this pivotal Treaty. So too in February Lithuania became the 141st country to accede to the Biological Weapons Convention, while in 1998 11 countries have acceded to the Convention banning chemical weapons, thus bringing the number of States parties to 117. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is making slow but sure progress; 151 countries have signed it and 21 have already ratified it.

Even though the size of the remaining strategic arsenals is considerable, it cannot be denied that substantive reductions have been made over these past few years by the United States and Russia, as well as by the European nuclear Powers. Other measures, such as detargeting and the reduction in the level of alert, are also highly promising. We would hope to see the dismantling of nuclear arsenals stepped up, but we cannot deny that the events under way are going in the right direction.

Significant progress has also been made at the Conference on Disarmament. The Conference has established two Ad Hoc Committees. The goal of one is effective international arrangements to guarantee non-nuclear States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The other has been entrusted to study the negotiation of a non-discriminatory, internationally and effectively verifiable multilateral treaty banning the production of fissile materials for the manufacture of weapons and other nuclear devices. The Conference on Disarmament has also appointed Special Coordinators entrusted with the task of reaching consensus concerning the transfer of anti-personnel mines, the prevention of the arms race in outer space and transparency in the arms field. There are also positive prospects for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on outer space in 1999.

Regarding biological weapons, we should hail the efforts made within the Ad Hoc Group to lead the international community to a protocol to strengthen the Convention. The treaty emphasizes the extent to which the conscience of mankind deplores the use of such methods of fighting. This reproof doubtless explains the considerable support for the establishment of a verification system.

The Committee will also agree that significant progress has been made with regard to security at the regional level, in particular through the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones. The Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Pelindaba and Bangkok attest to the growing interest in the creation of such zones, and soon Central Asia will join them.

The indiscriminate use and proliferation of small arms creates a new challenge for the United Nations. There is every indication that it wishes to meet that challenge. The submission to the Secretary-General last August of the report of the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms was important in this regard. I am happy to have been able to contribute to it.

Now we can congratulate the Secretary-General on the attention he has been giving to the problem of requests for assistance from Member States. The impact of small arms on the security and development of many countries has led him to establish a mechanism entitled "Coordinated Action on Small Arms (CASA)", in which the Department for Disarmament Affairs is playing a critical role.

In the same spirit, a group of Member States has wished to politically and financially support measures such as the collection of small arms and the demobilization and reintegration of former fighters into civilian society.

In many cases the new priority has been reflected not only in speeches but also in deeds. It is of course impossible to engage in an exhaustive summary, but some should be singled out for special mention.

In July 1998 the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Production of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials demonstrated a considerable international effort designed to control this kind of trade.

This year too the European Union adopted a code of conduct on the export of arms which will be a useful supplement to its 1997 programme designed to combat the illicit trade in conventional weapons.

In West Africa, Mali and other countries are pursuing, on the basis of extensive and successful national experience, the establishment of a regional moratorium.

In a related field, 92 countries this year participated in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, the highest number recorded so far. We should also welcome the publication for the first time of data dealing with national production. Of course, we are still far from universality, and I can only encourage all Governments to take part in this exercise.

At the same time, the quality of information supplied by Member States regarding their military expenditures has continued to improve. Collective awareness of the threat caused by conventional weapons can only gain from an expansion of and improvement in the mechanism for information and transparency.

One of the main concerns of the overwhelming majority of delegations continues to be that of anti-personnel mines. It is with great pleasure that the First Committee can hail the entry into force of the Convention banning anti-personnel mines. This major effort marks the conclusion of years of effort by numerous Governments, supplemented by decisive action by non-governmental organizations.

Before I conclude I should like to say a few words about the organization of the Committee's work. As delegations are aware, the First Committee has been entrusted with disarmament for 14 years now. Its activities supplement efforts made elsewhere, in particular at the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission. In 1997 my distinguished predecessor, Mr. Nkgowe of Botswana, asked the Committee to dedicate itself to "formulating an international disarmament agenda in such a way that it is focused on attainable goals". (*A/C.1/52/PV.3, p. 4*). For him, this agenda was to be practical, action-oriented and focused on key, up-to-date issues. I should like to endorse that recommendation and to encourage all members to reflect on the most appropriate method to implement it.

I should also like to say how deeply indebted I am to the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Dhanapala, and the officers of the Committee for the goodwill and wise advice which they will contribute to our deliberations.

Like my predecessors, I should like to point out that it is important for us to conduct our work within the time limits set for us; it is important also that speakers keep to topics specific to this Committee. In that spirit I am gratified to be able to work with the Chairmen of the regional groups and with all representatives and all delegations.

Progress in disarmament is not made in haste. On the contrary, patience and caution guarantee solid gains. But if the rhythm of diplomacy in disarmament is closer to that of botany than to that of mechanics we would be wrong to find there a pretext for excessive slowness or for unjustified procrastination. On the contrary, it is important to take advantage of every opportunity to make progress. The First Committee at this fifty-third session of the General Assembly provides one of those opportunities, and we must continue to be aware of that.

May our sole concern be to make our collective effort both consistent and fruitful. If the intensity of our commitment is commensurate with our patience we shall be meeting the expectations of the international community.

Statement by the Secretary-General

The Chairman (*interpretation from French*): On behalf of the Committee, I have the honour and great pleasure of warmly welcoming Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, who has kindly agreed to address the First Committee on the first day of its substantive work.

The Secretary-General: Let me begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your election to chair this important Committee. The fact that it is the First Committee of the General Assembly reflects the priority given to disarmament by the United Nations in its earliest days. I believe that emphasis was right.

As members of the Committee know, I decided last year to re-establish the Department for Disarmament Affairs, with an Under-Secretary-General as its head. I was very pleased that the General Assembly supported that decision. I am also glad that it acted on my recommendation to review the work of the Disarmament Commission and of this Committee. I know that the Committee plans to update, streamline and revitalize its work, and I look forward eagerly to the results.

I am also delighted to have Jayantha Dhanapala as Under-Secretary-General. He is ideally qualified for the post and has made an excellent start. Perhaps members are wondering why he is not here today. In a sense I am representing him while he is representing me. He has gone at my request to the capital of your country,

Mr. Chairman, to attend a conference on the important theme of "sustainable disarmament for sustainable development". It is good that the connection between these two central themes of the United Nations agenda — disarmament and development — is increasingly being understood and recognized.

Disarmament lies at the heart of the Organization's efforts to maintain and strengthen international peace and security.

It is sometimes said that weapons do not kill; people do. And it is true that in recent years some horrific acts of violence have been committed without recourse to sophisticated weapons. The Rwandan genocide is the example which haunts us all, but I could cite many others. Freshest in our minds, because of the horrific pictures we have seen, are the recent massacres in Kosovo. Small arms are used to inflict death or injury on thousands upon thousands of civilians every year. Even more shockingly, the overwhelming majority of these are women and children.

So disarmament has to concern itself with small weapons as well as large. I am glad that the international community is now coming to realize this. Let me salute in particular the moratorium initiated by the Economic Community of West African States on the trade and manufacture of small arms, and the recent entry into force of the Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of, and Trafficking in, Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials. Perhaps we need next a convention limiting the length of the titles of international agreements!

I must also thank Michael Douglas — a redoubtable handler of small arms on the cinema screen — for his work as a Messenger of Peace, alerting public opinion to the terrible damage these weapons cause in real life. I believe the global civil society can be mobilized on this issue as it has been so successfully on the issue of anti-personnel landmines.

We must be thankful that so many Member States have signed and ratified the Ottawa Convention — a global ban on landmines — which will enter into force next March, and we must now work hard to make this ban universal.

At the same time, we cannot afford to slacken our efforts to contain the proliferation of larger weapons, especially weapons of mass destruction. It would be the height of folly to take it for granted that such weapons are too terrible ever to be used and that States would keep them only as a deterrent. We know that nuclear weapons were used in 1945, from the devastating effects of which the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still suffering more than half a century later.

We know too that chemical weapons have been used extensively, notably against Iran and against civilians in northern Iraq in 1988. There too, 10 years later, the people of Halabja are still suffering the effects in the form of debilitating disease, birth deformities and aborted pregnancies.

As for the menace of biological weapons, it is almost too horrible to imagine. Yet we know that some States have developed such weapons and are keeping them in their arsenals. As long as States have such weapons at their disposal there will always be the risk that sooner or later they will resort to using them. And there is the ever present risk that they will escape from the control of States and fall into the hands of terrorists. That is why we must intensify our efforts to expand the membership of the Conventions on chemical weapons and biological weapons and make observance of them verifiable.

That is also why we must be concerned about the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan this year. Of course, I warmly welcome the declarations of intent to adhere to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) made here in the General Assembly by the Prime Ministers of those two States. We must all work to ensure that that Treaty enters into force as soon as possible. But we must also work to finish the job of promoting universal adherence to all the key treaties on weapons of mass destruction, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We must also bear in mind that the long-term sustainability of that Treaty depends on all parties' working seriously to implement all its articles.

The United Nations has worked for more than half a century to eliminate nuclear weapons everywhere and to oppose their acquisition anywhere. Given the potential devastation from the use of even one nuclear weapon, I believe global nuclear disarmament must remain at the top of our agenda. I look to this Committee to take the lead in working to rid the world of this menace and that of chemical and biological weapons.

I said a little earlier that disarmament and development are intimately connected. I believe they are in two ways.

First, disarmament is essential to effective conflict prevention and post-conflict peace-building in many parts of the developing world, and conflict is the worst enemy of development everywhere.

Secondly, even when an arms race does not lead directly to conflict, it still constitutes a cruel diversion of skills and resources away from development. While so many human needs remain unsatisfied, millions of people on this planet depend for their livelihood on producing, distributing or maintaining engines designed only to destroy — engines of which the best one can hope is that they will not be used. That is a terrible waste. More than that, it is a source of deep shame. As long as it continues none of us can take much pride in our humanity. The world looks to the United Nations, and the United Nations looks to this Committee to lead it in a different and more hopeful direction. I wish the Committee every success in its work. Be assured that it will have all the support that we in the Secretariat can give.

The Chairman: I thank Mr. Kofi Annan for his inspiring remarks, which I am sure will contribute significantly to the deliberations of the Committee. I understand that the Secretary-General has other pressing engagements and that he will have to leave us at this point. I wish him every success in his important endeavours.

Agenda items 63 to 79

General debate on all disarmament and international security items

Mr. De Icaza (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Allow me to convey to you, Sir, my delegation's congratulations on your election to the chairmanship of the Committee and to offer you our support in the conduct of our work. We have long been familiar with your professional skill and mastery of the issues of disarmament and security, and so we are sure that you will discharge your high responsibilities outstandingly and efficiently.

Through you, Sir, I wish to express the thanks of my delegation to the Secretary-General for addressing us. We know that his thinking on disarmament topics will duly be reflected in our debates.

This year we are celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. The international scene today is profoundly different from what it was 20 years ago; nevertheless, the Declaration of principles, the Programme of Action and the mechanisms for disarmament approved by consensus in that Final Document retain their full validity. The existence of nuclear weapons still constitutes a threat to the very survival of mankind, and disarmament and arms limitation, especially in the nuclear sphere, continue to be essential if we are to prevent the threat of nuclear war, strengthen international peace and security and promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

With the end of the cold war and the banning of chemical and biological weapons, the arguments that used to be invoked to justify the possession, stockpiling and technological improvement of nuclear weapons, and even their possible use, with potentially catastrophic results, have disappeared. Nevertheless, not only do nuclear weapons continue to exist, but new justifications have emerged in the form of new doctrines of deterrence, and even doctrines of first use, and these have been subscribed to by nuclear-weapon Powers which had formerly rejected them.

Still more serious, disturbing cracks have appeared in the international non-proliferation regime, and the reduction processes that appeared so promising, such as START, now appear to have come to a standstill.

Meanwhile, the risks of nuclear weapons being used by accident or miscalculation, or in an unauthorized manner, have increased, not decreased, and the risks of loss of control of the technology and materials associated with the manufacture of nuclear weapons have become greater. Taken together, all these factors would appear to lead to the conclusion that the probability of nuclear weapons being used is now greater than it was in 1978. Accordingly, the priority today, as then, in relation to disarmament and security must be nuclear disarmament, which calls for urgent negotiations in appropriate phases and with adequate verification measures, leading as soon as possible to the complete and definitive elimination of nuclear-weapon arsenals and their delivery systems.

The paralysis in the nuclear disarmament process and in negotiations is apparent from the fact that almost six years after its signature the START II Treaty has still not entered into force, the Conference on Disarmament has not been able to establish an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, the Disarmament Commission has not reached consensus on the objective or the agenda for a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, and the Preparatory Committee for the Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty

has not succeeded in formulating substantive recommendations on nuclear disarmament.

Some of these facts are undoubtedly the result of temporary situations, but underlying them and not infrequently coming to the surface are archaic perceptions of the role of nuclear weapons in military strategies, and these are in urgent need of change. We shall see no substantive advances in the absence of an unequivocal commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world. In order to make progress towards this objective there needs to be a conviction that possessing nuclear weapons confers neither special rights nor special privileges, in no way guarantees invulnerability, but, on the contrary, increases the vulnerability of those that possess them, and that the very existence of these weapons is an intolerable threat to mankind.

The international non-proliferation regime, consisting of the nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties, the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty and the decisions that accompanied its indefinite extension in 1995, and the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, needs to be maintained and strengthened, because it is essential to international peace and security and because it is a prerequisite and legally binding support for nuclear disarmament. This regime urgently needs the attention of the international community, as it has been seriously affected this year by the failure of the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and, in particular, by the nuclear-weapon tests that took place in South Asia.

The second session of the Preparatory Committee concluded with a procedural report only, not merely because of the absence of consensus in a given situation but because of differing views on the scope and purpose of the Preparatory Committee, particularly on principles, objectives and means of achieving nuclear disarmament and the full implementation of article VI of the Treaty.

The Non-Proliferation Treaty, the cornerstone of the regime, is transient in nature, notwithstanding its indefinite extension. It is valid only until nuclear disarmament is achieved, and resolute, systematic and progressive efforts towards the final objective of eliminating nuclear weapons worldwide are of crucial importance to it. Interruptions or pauses, and above all deadlocks, in the nuclear disarmament process call into question the international non-proliferation regime, because they accentuate its imbalances and make it difficult for it to achieve the necessary universality. At its next session the Preparatory Committee will have to make a special effort to reach a consensus that will make it possible to formulate concrete recommendations on nuclear disarmament at the Conference of the Parties in the year 2000.

The Preparatory Committee also needs to recommend to the Conference the establishment of subsidiary bodies to deal with specific issues relating to the Treaty, so that they can be studied in greater detail. We welcome in this context South Africa's important initiative for detailed discussion of the issue of security assurances.

Mexico deplored and condemned the nuclear-weapon tests conducted in South Asia in May this year, as it has always condemned the conducting of any nuclear-weapon test, the definitive halting of which is essential to world peace and security, to the international non-proliferation regime in all its aspects and to the achievement of a nuclear-weapon-free world. At this session of the General Assembly we shall be submitting draft resolutions deploring the conducting of any nuclear-weapon tests and calling for the early signature and ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, maintenance of the moratoriums, and respect for the spirit and letter of the Treaty pending its entry into force.

The constant threat which the existence of nuclear weapons poses to mankind, the paralysis in multilateral forums in negotiations to achieve nuclear disarmament and the pressures on the international non-proliferation regime have convinced many countries of the need for a new international agenda to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world through the parallel implementation of mutually reinforcing measures at the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral levels. In June this year the Foreign Ministers of Mexico, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa and Sweden issued a joint Declaration to this effect, and we shall be submitting a draft resolution for consideration by the General Assembly.

It is time to bring an end to extreme positions on nuclear disarmament. The time has come to take the necessary steps to give new strength and perspective to nuclear disarmament. The circumstances are favourable and much is at stake. We must all, without exception, make an unequivocal commitment to a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Today nuclear-weapon-free zones cover more than 50 per cent of the planet's land surface. Mexico will continue to support efforts aimed at the creation of new nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of agreements freely arrived at between the States of which they are composed and at

strengthening existing nuclear-weapon-free zones so that they may achieve regional universality. We will seek to expand political links between existing zones in order to progress towards the objective of freeing the entire southern hemisphere and its adjacent areas from nuclear weapons. We support the initiative for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

The Government of Mexico reiterates its readiness to cooperate in the establishment of mechanisms for coordination and cooperation between the bodies established under the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, Pelindaba and Bangkok, with a view to exchanging information and experiences that will make it possible to promote our common objectives.

The establishment in August this year of an Ad Hoc Committee, under item 1 of the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, charged with negotiating a convention banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices has the support of my delegation. Nevertheless, we wish to make it clear that for Mexico it is a priority that the treaty should constitute not only a non-proliferation measure but also a genuine nuclear disarmament measure.

While a halt in the production of fissile material must be one of the objectives of the treaty, for it to constitute a genuine nuclear disarmament measure, binding commitments are required with respect to the treatment to be accorded to existing stockpiles, including those for civilian reactors using fissile material that may also have military applications. We are committed to participating constructively in the Conference on Disarmament in negotiations conducted on a transparent basis and agreed to by consensus.

My delegation is pleased that, a year after the entry into force of the Paris Convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons and the launching of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the latter has embarked on its institution-building phase and the verification regime under the Convention is in full force. These achievements need to be strengthened through full completion of the initial declaration process, which, as yet, 26 per cent of the States parties to the Convention are far from having undertaken. The reluctance of States bound by articles IV and V of the Convention to assume the costs resulting from the verification and destruction of stockpiled chemical weapons is a matter of concern for my delegation.

Mexico has on various occasions indicated the priority it attaches to the conclusion of negotiations on a protocol with respect to verification of the Convention banning biological weapons. It has associated itself with the joint statements of the non-aligned countries and the States of Latin America. On 23 September Mexico's Foreign Minister, Ambassador Rosario Green, participated in the ministerial meeting at which 57 States reiterated their political will to conclude negotiations on a verification protocol in order to strengthen the regime for the banning of biological weapons.

Mexico reiterates its call for flexibility in order to discharge the mandate of the Ad Hoc Group by designing an efficient and low-cost verification mechanism and putting into effect measures that will strengthen international cooperation in biotechnology and the equipment associated with its peaceful uses.

For the verification mechanism to be reliable and to promote trust among States, its provisions need to be defined rigorously and with legal clarity. All duplications and ambiguities, as well as unnecessary interpolations, need to be avoided. The protocol must be able to achieve universality and to do so it needs to be approved by consensus.

Mexico's interests and initiatives are not confined to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction — starting with nuclear weapons — although nuclear disarmament is for our country, as for the majority of nations, the highest priority in disarmament. The excessive availability, stockpiling and transfer of conventional weapons, especially the illegal traffic in small arms and light weapons, affects the security of all States, since they not only fuel conflicts but also strengthen organized crime, making it more difficult to combat drug-trafficking and encouraging terrorism.

Evidence of the urgent need to adopt effective measures against illicit trafficking is provided by the speed with which it was possible to negotiate and conclude, on the initiative of the Government of Mexico, the Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of, and Trafficking in, Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials, which was signed by 29 countries on 14 November 1997 in the presence of the Presidents of Mexico and the United States of America at the headquarters of the Organization of American States (OAS). I am pleased to report that the Convention is now in force, with the deposit of the instruments of ratification by the Governments of Mexico and Belize, and we hope

that it will shortly attain the regional universality it deserves.

Mexico supports the work of the United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms by participating actively in the experts' discussion regarding the implementation of measures to prevent and reduce excessive and destabilizing accumulations and transfers of such weapons. Mexico hopes that the Panel will be able to submit for the consideration of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session a report containing additional measures for the attainment of those objectives. We wish to express our support for the holding of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects, as proposed in the report of the previous Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms. We believe that the international community should take advantage of the current favourable situation for defining international actions to combat illicit trafficking in small arms.

The worldwide mobilization for the eradication of anti-personnel mines culminated in the deposit, on 16 September, of the fortieth instrument of ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The speed with which the process of ratification of the Convention was completed, which will enable it to enter into force on 1 March next year, is a source of profound satisfaction for my Government. Mexico, acting on the basis of its commitment to make its provisions effective, deposited its instrument of ratification of the Ottawa Convention on 9 June this year.

The countries committed to the total banning of anti-personnel mines will be submitting to the General Assembly a draft resolution inviting all States to sign, ratify or accede without delay to the Ottawa Convention.

With the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention we face the challenge of its effective implementation. The Governments of Mexico and Canada, with the support of the OAS, will in January 1999 be convening in Mexico a regional seminar with the purpose of making progress towards the objective of proclaiming the western hemisphere a zone free of anti-personnel mines in the year 2000. We also undertake to participate actively in the preparatory work for the first meeting of States parties, which will take place in Maputo next year.

When I spoke in the First Committee last year I said:

> "It is the responsibility of all to respond to the universal demands for a nuclear-weapon-free world. Those of us who are committed to the goal of nuclear disarmament will in the end find a way to overcome the paralysis imposed on us." (*A/C.1/52/PV.3, p. 6*)

I added that Mexico would be initiating consultations to explore the possibility of holding a world conference on nuclear disarmament. We are pleased to inform the Committee that this idea is well under way and is winning support. In June this year President Mubarak of Egypt took the initiative of calling for the convening, as soon as possible, of an international conference to consider the measures required to achieve a world free from weapons of mass destruction, and in particular nuclear weapons, and at the twelfth summit of the Non-Aligned Movement the Heads of State or Government called for the holding of an international conference for the purpose of reaching agreement before the end of this millennium on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Where nuclear disarmament — the responsibility of all — is concerned we must all strive to overcome the current paralysis that prevails in negotiations and in multilateral forums.

Mr. Hajnoczi (Austria): On behalf of the European Union (EU) let me congratulate you most sincerely, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the First Committee. We are confident that your able direction, long-standing experience and well-earned reputation in the disarmament community will ensure fruitful work in the Committee this year. The European Union assures you of its wholehearted support in the discharge of your important responsibilities. We are particularly happy to see the representative of an EU member State in the chair.

We are most grateful to the Secretary-General for addressing the First Committee this morning and giving such an important statement.

The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — as well as European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

As the end of the twentieth century approaches, there have been important achievements in the international security environment, but it also faces serious challenges.

The opening for signature and the prospect of the entry into force on 1 March 1999 of the Ottawa Convention; the recent decision to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty; work on setting up the verification system for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT); the adoption of a Model Protocol, in addition to existing safeguards agreements at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to strengthen nuclear safeguards; the continuation of the reinforced process of reviewing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); the active pursuit of negotiations, in the Ad Hoc Group, on a legally binding protocol establishing a verification and compliance regime which would effectively strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention; and the efforts currently devoted to problems caused by the excessive availability, accumulation and uncontrolled proliferation of small arms: all bear witness to the commitment of the international community to develop the network of international disarmament and non-proliferation agreements further.

Regrettably, despite these measures, the risk of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the problems caused by destabilizing accumulations of conventional weapons have still not been removed. The European Union calls for a continuing commitment by the international community in the fight against such risks, which threaten us all.

The European Union expresses its deep concern over the situation in South Asia. The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan have damaged stability in the region and isolated both countries from the international community's efforts on non-proliferation. The Union has repeatedly condemned those tests, has called on both countries to adhere to the international non-proliferation regime and strongly urged India and Pakistan to refrain from further nuclear tests and from the development, assembly or deployment of nuclear weapons and/or ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads.

The European Union has taken due note of statements by both sides regarding moratoriums on further nuclear tests. The European Union welcomes the apparent intention of India and Pakistan to adhere to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. They should sign and ratify the Treaty swiftly and unconditionally. They should also adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty as it stands. The European Union welcomes the intention of India and Pakistan to contribute to the negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Conference on Disarmament. We now urge both countries to introduce moratoriums on fissile material production while a treaty is negotiated. We urge both countries to legislate to exert stringent controls over the export of material, equipment and technology controlled under the Nuclear Suppliers Group trigger and dual-use lists and the Missile Technology Control Regime Annex.

The European Union welcomes the 23 September agreement by India and Pakistan to resume the dialogue between them on all outstanding issues, particularly on all matters pertaining to peace and security. The Union stands ready to contribute to efforts to promote regional stability.

With regard to security developments in Europe, the Union is pursuing the objective of consolidating peace and stability for the whole of the continent. The development of the new European security architecture should reflect the new spirit of cooperation in Europe, which must now be worked out more fully. European security is by definition comprehensive and indivisible, and the new security architecture must give full weight to the legitimate security interests of all the countries of Europe and presume the freedom of States to choose their own security arrangements. The European Union accordingly believes that the various organizations with responsibility for security in Europe should continue to interact and mutually reinforce one another. It encourages close coordination and, where appropriate, cooperation between the international organizations concerned, notably between the United Nations and the other institutions which have responsibility for European security.

One of the main objectives of the Union in the work within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is to develop a new charter on European Security. The Union actively supports the OSCE as a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter and its role within the OSCE area in conflict prevention, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the promotion of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Also in this respect the Union has continued to develop its relationship with the Western European Union (WEU) which allows the EU to play a more active role in the so-called Petersberg tasks, which include certain peace support operations. The European Union is convinced that the current enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance and the open-door policy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will contribute

to the consolidation of peace and stability without creating new divisions in Europe. The Union is also making an important contribution, through the active pursuit of a transparent and open dialogue with other countries on the continent — such as the Russian Federation and Ukraine — and with neighbouring regions, notably the countries of the Mediterranean basin, on issues regarding the new security architecture.

The Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) is a cornerstone of Europe's security and should remain so in the new European security architecture. To this end the EU calls on States parties to the CFE Treaty to conclude the adaptation negotiations expeditiously. It welcomes the decision of 23 July 1997 on certain basic elements for treaty adaptation and the progress achieved since then. We look forward to speedy progress in the forthcoming negotiations in Vienna. Member countries of the OSCE which are not parties to the Treaty are being informed of the progress of negotiations in the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation, which continues to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of conventional arms control in Europe. Among other things, the OSCE plays an important role in assisting the implementation of the commitments on arms limitation and regional stabilization provided for in the general framework on peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Union welcomes the continuing progress with regard to confidence-building and security-building measures and arms control in the former Yugoslavia, as covered in articles II and IV of annex 1 B of the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement (A/50/790). The Union looks forward to the commencement of negotiations as provided for in article V of annex 1 B, with the objective of establishing regional peace and stability in and around the former Yugoslavia, and calls on the parties to engage actively in the upcoming negotiation process.

Consolidating peace in the former Yugoslavia and solving the Kosovo crisis continued to be one of the Union's top priorities in the past year. The Union remains committed to implementing the arms embargo on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and has asked the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM) in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania to report to the Sanctions Committee any relevant information that should come into its possession on the movement of arms. The Union also remains fully committed to the objectives agreed at the Bonn Peace Implementation Council last December for implementation of the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement this year and beyond.

The European Union is deeply concerned and alarmed at the situation in Kosovo, and calls for immediate and full compliance with all the provisions of Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998) and 1199 (1998).

As the largest donor to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Union is particularly concerned to see progress through permanent peace, reconciliation and stability. The EU has supported institution-building, reconstruction and refugee return in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To underpin this commitment the Union issued a declaration on 8 June on closer cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Europe, if Bosnia and Herzegovina continues on the right road to peace and democracy.

The Union also launched a Consultative Task Force to use EU expertise to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina along this road. Now the September elections have taken place the Union will continue this close cooperation if the new leadership lives up to its obligations as set out in the Dayton/Paris Agreement.

The Union reiterates its request that signatory States that have not yet ratified the "Open Skies" Treaty should do so as soon as possible.

The European Union attaches the utmost importance to progress in the areas of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation as a key element of the maintenance of peace and the strengthening of international security. The Union will continue to make a substantial contribution to the promotion of international efforts in this respect.

The Union considers that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons remains the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. The EU promotes the implementation of the objectives laid down in the Treaty and the 1995 decision on principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. The EU attaches the utmost importance to a universal adherence to the Treaty that strengthens its fundamental role and reinforces global non-proliferation and disarmament objectives, and warmly welcomes the recent accession of Brazil to the NPT.

In preparing for the second session in 1998, the Council defined a common position on 23 April this year, setting the EU objectives with a view to the successful

outcome of the 2000 NPT Review Conference. Pursuant to the provisions of the common position, the EU will continue to promote universal accession to the NPT, encourage participation in the Preparatory Committee's sessions and in the 2000 Review Conference and help to build consensus at the Preparatory Committee's sessions and at the Conference itself. The Union regrets that the Preparatory Committee's second session did not allow for substantial results on substantive issues and did not lead to recommendations to the third session. We urge all participants in the third session of the Preparatory Committee to work towards consensus solutions. Bearing in mind the importance of the decision on principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, the European Union remains firmly committed to the successful outcome of the 2000 Review Conference and is ready to continue to play an active and constructive role in the strengthened review process.

The European Union welcomed the adoption on 15 May 1997 by the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of a Model Protocol Additional to Safeguards Agreements containing measures to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the efficiency of the Agency's safeguards system, by increasing its ability to detect undeclared nuclear activities. On 8 June 1998 the European Union Council authorized the Commission to conclude with the IAEA, on behalf of the European Atomic Energy Community, three additional protocols covering the 13 non-nuclear-weapon member States of the EU, the United Kingdom and France. On 22 September 1998 these additional protocols were signed in Vienna by the parties concerned. The Union calls on all States having safeguards agreements with the IAEA to conclude additional protocols to these agreements on the basis of the Model Protocol.

We must once again reiterate that we remain deeply concerned by the continuing non-compliance of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with its safeguards agreement. We strongly urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to come into full compliance with its safeguards agreement with the IAEA at the earliest possible time and to support non-proliferation efforts by refraining from any act, including any act in the ballistic missiles field, that would run counter to stability in the region. The EU expresses its concern at the launch carried out by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 31 August. We continue fully to support the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and the Agreed Framework, and we call on other countries to contribute to the non-proliferation objectives of the organization.

The situation in Iraq calls for continued vigilance. The EU is committed to full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions and urges Iraq to comply with the provisions of these resolutions and with the Memorandum of Understanding signed in February this year by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq. Full compliance with the disarmament provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions will enable the Security Council to lift sanctions in accordance with paragraph 22 of Security Council resolution 687 (1991).

The EU deplores Iraq's unilateral suspension of cooperation with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) and the IAEA. The European Union is concerned that Iraq remains in contravention of its obligations under the Security Council resolutions and the Memorandum of Understanding. This situation is totally unacceptable. Iraq must respond immediately to Security Council resolution 1194 (1998) and resume full cooperation with UNSCOM and the IAEA. The European Union notes that the Secretary-General has presented his view to Security Council members on the comprehensive review of Iraq's compliance with the relevant resolutions, as required by Security Council resolution 1194 (1998). Once Iraq has resumed full cooperation, as required by Security Council resolution 1194 (1998), such a review should take place and it should address Iraq's compliance and what remains to be done under the relevant resolutions.

Following the successful conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996, which constitutes an important step on the way towards the implementation of the principles and objectives of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament the European Union has been active and will continue to be active in promoting the early entry into force of the Treaty and its universality. The European Union welcomes the fact that 150 countries have signed the Treaty and 21 have now ratified it. It calls on all States to sign and ratify the Treaty, especially those 44 States whose ratification is needed for the Treaty to come into force. The Union also fully supports the efforts of the Preparatory Committee to establish the Treaty's verification regime in a timely and effective manner.

As the CTBT negotiations have been successfully concluded, the realization of the second measure under the action programme contained in the decision on principles and objectives is now called for. This involves the immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations on a non-discriminatory and universally applicable convention banning the production of fissile

material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices — the fissile material cut-off treaty. Therefore Austria, currently holding the Presidency of the European Union, proposed a draft decision on the fissile material cut-off treaty at the beginning of the 1998 session of the Conference on Disarmament. The Union heartily welcomes the achievement of consensus on the basis of the Shannon Report and the mandate contained therein, and the decision to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to negotiate a fissile material cut-off treaty for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

We have frequently reiterated the importance of such a treaty which will make a significant contribution to the achievement of both nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. We urge all States to introduce or maintain a moratorium on fissile material production for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices pending the conclusion of these negotiations. We look forward to making our contribution to the substantial negotiations which should start at the beginning of the 1999 session of the Conference on Disarmament.

The European Union continues to believe that the systematic and progressive efforts of nuclear-weapon States to globally reduce nuclear weapons need to be intensified and pursued with determination. Following the entry into force and rapid implementation of START I, and unilateral measures taken by other nuclear-weapon States, including the United Kingdom following its strategic defence review, and France, the Union reiterates its urgent call on the Russian Federation to ratify the START II Treaty without delay so as to enable its rapid entry into force and the immediate opening and rapid conclusion of negotiations on a START III treaty.

The European Union welcomes the recent renewed commitment by the nuclear-weapon States to nuclear disarmament under article VI of the NPT and expresses its strong hope that START III will be followed by further reductions. It has taken note of the recent initiative on nuclear disarmament by several countries, including Ireland and Sweden. It also takes note of Belgium's proposal at the Conference on Disarmament to establish a study group on the exchange of information related to article VI of the NPT.

In line with the principles and objectives of the NPT, the European Union considers that further steps should be considered to assure non-nuclear-weapon States Parties to the NPT against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. These steps could take the form of an internationally legally binding instrument. In this respect, the Union stresses the importance of the decision by the Conference on Disarmament to establish an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances.

In the Union's view, the creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones, on the basis of arrangements freely concluded between the States of the region concerned, strengthens global and regional peace and security. The Union underlines the importance of such zones, as well as the establishment of zones free of all weapons of mass destruction, the significance of which was emphasized by the decision on principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It welcomes advances made so far and continues to support efforts to establish a Middle Eastern zone free of nuclear arms and a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, as well as zones free of nuclear weapons in South Asia and Central Asia. The Union notes that all but one of the countries in the Middle East region are parties to the NPT. It recalls the resolution of the 1995 NPT Conference calling upon all States in the Middle East which had not yet done so to accede without exception to the NPT as soon as possible and to make progress towards the creation of such a zone.

The European Union considers the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC), which entered into force on 29 April 1997, a landmark in the disarmament process. It is strongly committed to its universality and to the full and effective implementation of its provisions. It calls on all States that have not yet done so to ratify and accede to the Convention without delay. It also calls on all States parties to fulfil without delay their obligations in relation to the declarations required by the Convention, as well as all their other obligations under the Convention. In this context the Union recalls its decision to offer assistance to the Russian Federation in fields related to the Convention. This assistance complements the bilateral assistance provided for this purpose by several of its member States. The Union will continue to contribute actively to the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and to the setting up of the Organization's institutional and organizational structures.

The European Union reaffirms the high priority it gives to the reinforcement of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BWC), in particular to the early and

successful conclusion of the negotiations in the BWC Ad Hoc Group on a legally binding protocol establishing a verification and compliance regime which will effectively strengthen the Convention. The EU wishes to see the adoption of the protocol in 1999 and supports the Declaration adopted on 23 September in New York at the informal ministerial meeting on the negotiations towards the conclusion of the protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention.

The Union has always played an active role in the Ad Hoc Group negotiations and has reaffirmed its continued commitment by defining on 4 March 1998 a common position on progress towards a BWC legally binding protocol and on intensifying work in the Ad Hoc Group to that end, notably through the allocation of the time necessary to the negotiations. In its common position the Union identifies particular measures which are deemed to be both central and essential to an effective protocol, such as declarations, visits, and provisions for rapid and effective investigations, as well as a cost-effective and independent organization. The Union was strongly encouraged by the support that the elements of its common position gathered in the Ad Hoc Group and will continue to promote its objectives in future sessions.

The European Union emphasizes the scale of the contribution made by the non-proliferation and export control systems to the concerted action by the international community against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons. The various international conventions, which are the expression of the wish of the international community to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, must be backed up in practice by export control measures. It is essential that exporting States assume their responsibilities and take measures to ensure that exports of sensitive materials, equipment and technologies are subject to an appropriate system of surveillance and control. An appropriate system of export controls makes it easier for the technological development of the countries concerned to be pursued on a cooperative basis by ensuring that partners can have confidence that goods, technology and materials will only be used for peaceful purposes.

Like the standardized reporting system on military expenditure, the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms is an essential, global instrument for promoting transparency in conventional armaments and confidence-building between States. The EU therefore considers it of great importance that all States should submit regular returns of their imports and exports in the seven categories of the Register. Even the submission of a "nil" return, in cases where no arms transfers have taken place, contributes to transparency. The value of the Register will of course be increased if participation is as broad as possible. The Union reiterates its call on all States to submit timely returns, including — to further increase transparency and strengthen the value of the Register — information on military holdings and procurement through national production. The EU would support a decision by the Conference on Disarmament in 1999 to reappoint a special coordinator on transparency in armaments to further investigate, in an ad hoc committee, possible measures in the field of transparency in armaments with a view to building confidence and enhancing security between States.

Pursuant to last year's resolution on the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures, a group of interested countries was established in order to exchange information and coordinate concrete activities and projects. This valuable initiative represents an important step that goes beyond an abstract consideration of the complex subject of the role of disarmament in post-conflict situations and crisis prevention, and takes concrete action.

The Council of the European Union adopted on 8 June 1998 a Code of Conduct on arms exports. Building on the common criteria for arms exports defined by the European Council in 1991 and 1992, the Code aims at setting high common standards for the management of, and restraint in, conventional arms transfers by all member States and strengthening the exchange of relevant information with a view to achieving greater transparency. European Union member States will use their best endeavours to encourage other arms-exporting States to subscribe to the principles and criteria of the Code of Conduct.

The European Union is currently engaged in implementing the EU Programme for preventing and combating illicit trafficking in conventional arms adopted by the Council on 26 June 1997, which set the framework for the Union's action, in particular to assist third countries to prevent and combat the illicit trafficking of arms and to assist affected countries, particularly in post-conflict situations, to suppress the illicit circulation and trafficking of arms, with special emphasis on small arms. The European Union is of the view that a serious challenge is presented to the international community by the combination of internal conflict and the proliferation of small arms, and it welcomes the re-establishment of the small arms Panel to continue within the United Nations the work already started.

The European Union encourages the group of experts to formulate a recommendation on the objectives, scope and timing of an international conference on the illicit arms trade in all its aspects in time for consideration by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. The European Union has also initiated discussions on further measures on small arms in the framework of its common policy. In this context the Union calls upon all States to make every effort so as to enable the United Nations Disarmament Commission during its 1999 session to reach consensus and adopt guidelines on a comprehensive and integrated approach towards the consolidation of peace through practical disarmament measures.

The European Union reaffirms its commitment to the goal of the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines worldwide and of contributing to solving problems already caused by these weapons. The Union welcomed the opening for signature in Ottawa on 3 and 4 December 1997 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and the efforts made by its signatories to promote universal accession to the Convention. We are pleased that 130 countries have now signed and that within a very short space of time the trigger point of 40 ratifications has been reached so that the Convention will enter into force on 1 March 1999.

On the eve of the Ottawa Conference, on 28 November 1997, the European Union Conference adopted a new joint action on anti-personnel landmines in which the Union reiterates its commitment and establishes a common moratorium on the production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. All EU member States should take appropriate steps to comply with the objectives of the Ottawa Convention pending its entry into force, and undertake to participate actively in the conferences to be organized after the signature of the Convention. In addition, the Union will seek to promote, in all the appropriate forums, including the Conference on Disarmament, all efforts likely to contribute to the joint action objectives.

In parallel, the joint action sets out the framework for specific actions and financial contributions by the Union to mine action. In the period 1993 to 1997 the Union contributed $140 million to demining activities and assistance to victims. That amount does not include individual contributions by EU member States. In 1998 the Union plans to increase its already considerable efforts by earmarking $60 million for demining and victim assistance initiatives. That makes the European Union the world's major donor in these areas. It is in this spirit that the Union confirms its intention to continue working actively to promote the efforts of the international community towards the complete elimination of anti-personnel landmines. To that end the Union believes that in order to allocate and use more efficiently the resources made available in the fight against anti-personnel landmines, improved international coordination is essential. The EU supports the central coordinating role of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian mine action worldwide, welcomes the creation of the United Nations Mine Action Service and welcomes all efforts to achieve a more coherent response within the United Nations and beyond to the challenge posed by the many millions of anti-personnel landmines.

The European Union looks forward to the entry into force on 3 December 1998 of amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or To Have Indiscriminate Effects. The Union also welcomes the entry into force on 30 July 1998 of Protocol IV on blinding laser weapons. It calls upon all States that have not yet done so to become parties to the Convention and the protocols attached thereto, in particular, amended Protocol II and Protocol IV.

In June 1996 the Union welcomed the decision of the Conference on Disarmament to admit new members, some of which are member States of the Union. It also welcomes the fact that in its resolution 52/40 A the General Assembly encouraged the Conference on Disarmament to continue the further review of its membership. This year also a Special Coordinator on the expansion of Conference on Disarmament membership was appointed and his report was submitted to the Conference on Disarmament. As consensus was not reached, the EU considers it necessary to reappoint a special coordinator at the beginning of the 1999 session of the Conference on Disarmament to continue consultations on this issue. The EU will continue its efforts to support the candidature of the five member States and four associated countries which have applied for admission.

Significant progress was made during the substantive session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission this spring to reach a consensus on the objectives and agenda of a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV). The EU regrets the fact that despite this progress no agreement has yet been reached. The European Union reaffirms its conviction that, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/38 F, SSOD IV should be convened only after the emergence of a consensus on its objectives and agenda. The Union stands ready to work constructively towards such a consensus.

The European Union welcomes the important decisions taken by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session on the rationalization of the work and reform of the agenda of the First Committee and on the revitalization, rationalization and streamlining of the work of the Disarmament Commission. But the EU regrets that only limited steps could be agreed. Reform of the First Committee remains a priority. The EU will work for consensus on further rationalization of the Committee's work to be reached at this session. Reform, as we understand it, is an ongoing process and further steps should follow the achievements recently made.

Mr. Bune (Fiji): My delegation is happy to see you, Sir, presiding over the work of the Committee at this fifty-third session and extends to you our warm congratulations. We assure you and other members of the Bureau of our full support and cooperation. We also salute the excellent work of your predecessor, Mr. Nkgowe of Botswana, and wish to thank the Secretary-General for the important statement he made to the Committee this morning.

Disarmament and international security remain one of the cornerstones of the United Nations. A culture of peace and international security is the sine qua non for accelerated international action and cooperation in such critical areas as economic, social and human development. Secure and lasting peace and international security are all basic and fundamental to fashioning a better world for every nation-State. Over the past year the international community has been inundated with platitudinous statements calling for prompt and effective disarmament. The words, however, have not been matched by deeds. Despite the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), nuclear tests were carried out earlier this year by India and Pakistan. They were underground tests. We do not know how many simulated tests have been carried out with state-of-the-art computer technology by other nuclear-weapon States.

It seems clear that if we are to make any significant strides towards prompt and effective disarmament and international security, we must create more effective measures to reduce and ultimately eliminate all weapons of mass destruction.

We must pursue with political will and alacrity the universality of existing instruments or they will be meaningless. We must create mechanisms to ensure their effective implementation.

In the area of nuclear weapons the international community must cooperate and collaborate to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons simultaneously. As a first step towards reducing nuclear weapons Fiji calls on all nuclear-weapon States to immediately halt the production and testing, in whatever form, of nuclear weapons.

We also call on all nuclear-weapon States to destroy all stockpiles of nuclear weapons, and we urge all States to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We particularly enjoin India and Pakistan to do so. Not only should we make the treaties universal, but we must also ensure the effective implementation of such legal instruments or posterity may well classify us as a roost of procrastinators.

Fiji believes that nuclear-weapon States must demonstrate their obligations to, and fulfilment of, the provisions of the NPT. In that regard, the NPT review process must be qualitatively different and a much more forward-looking exercise.

The CTBT Treaty has been signed so far by 150 countries, but it has been ratified by only 25, of which Fiji is one. Thirty-two Member States of the 44 listed in annex 2 of the Convention are yet to ratify the Treaty in order for it to enter into force. We accordingly urge all States that have signed the Treaty to ratify it as well if it is to become an effective instrument for nuclear disarmament.

Fiji considers the START process to be an important part of the matrix of reduction and elimination and strongly urges that the process be energized and widened to include other nuclear-weapon States.

The creation of nuclear-weapon-free zones in many parts of the world has greatly assisted our initiatives to establish a nuclear-weapon-free world. We continue to urge all countries in such zones to become parties to the regional initiative and where such zones do not now exist, we urge their creation. The NPT and the CTBT are but steps along the path to the total elimination of all nuclear weapons from our planet. To achieve the end result we must now work towards the negotiation and conclusion of a treaty for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free world within a specified time framework. Our delegation hopes that significant progress will be made in the Conference on Disarmament.

Associated with our endeavours for complete nuclear disarmament is the question of the production and transfer

of fissile materials for the manufacture of nuclear weapons. A ban on the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons purposes needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. We should make every effort within the Conference on Disarmament to establish a fissile material inventory and to commence negotiation as soon as possible on a fissile material cut-off treaty.

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC) came into force last year. The Convention, however, lacks universality. We accordingly call on all States, especially States which possess, produce, or have the capacity to produce, chemical weapons to become parties to the Convention. We also call for the full implementation of the provisions of the Convention.

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BWC) also lacks universality. We continue to call on all States which have not already done so to become parties to the Convention. We also call for the early conclusion of the verification protocol and for the full commitment and substantial participation of all parties to ensure the full implementation of the Treaty.

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction now exists, and appropriately so, for my delegation continues to submit that these weapons are an abomination in our world and ought to be totally eliminated from the armaments of countries. Our country has signed the Convention, and we call on all those which have not already done so to join the vast majority of Member States in signing the Convention. We urge all States which have not yet done so to ratify it. The international community must in the meantime cooperate and collaborate in the removal and elimination of the millions of landmines placed in various parts of the world, and at the same time advance the care, rehabilitation and social and economic reintegration of landmine victims. Simultaneously we must act collectively and unambiguously to end the use, production and stockpiling of anti-personnel mines.

It is a sad reflection on our times that human tragedies in several nation-States today result from conventional weapons. Conventional weapons, especially small arms and light weapons, have played havoc in several countries in Africa and Eastern Europe. The proliferation in the production, sale and transfer of conventional weapons has led to incidents of genocide and ethnic cleansing. High priority should therefore be given to the preparation and promulgation of strategies and policies aimed at preventing the proliferation of the supply of conventional weapons and, in particular, limiting their flow to areas of conflict. Fiji fully supports the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms and trusts that the report of the Panel will be given the prompt and serious attention it deserves in the Conference on Disarmament and within the Department for Disarmament Affairs. We also urge all Member States to fully support and participate in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. The Register is an effective instrument in facilitating transparency. We would like to see adjustments broadening the categories of weapons covered by the Register in order to ensure that it is more relevant.

The incidence of intra-State conflicts constitutes a threat to peace and security. Those conflicts not only give rise to the large-scale displacement of persons and to genocide but also result in massive transboundary refugee flows which impact severely on social and economic conditions within receiving countries. My delegation therefore welcomes and supports current efforts aimed at promoting confidence-building measures at the regional and subregional levels in order to ease tensions and conflicts.

At the same time, we must fully institute organized and structured arrangements to prevent conflicts instead of reacting to them after they have started. We therefore renew our call for the establishment of a permanent mechanism or division of preventive diplomacy within the United Nations that can respond promptly, positively and actively to threats of potential conflict and genocide. Such a division should have the capacity to receive, collate, analyse and interpret intelligence information and reports with a view to the early detection of potential conflicts and early reactions to such detection in order to minimize, contain and resolve such threats in collaboration with relevant Member States.

In conclusion, our delegation urges the international community and individual countries to pursue a culture of peace and international security and to eschew a culture of war and conflict.

Mr. Goosen (South Africa): Please accept my delegation's congratulations, Sir, on your assumption of the chair of the First Committee of the General Assembly during its fifty-third session. I wish to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation as you and your

Bureau lead the work of the Committee to a successful conclusion.

At last year's First Committee session South Africa categorized 1997 as a year in which the international community, while being able to demonstrate several accomplishments in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament, was unable to grasp the opportunities that were available.

It was our stated hope that 1998 would prove to be more productive, and that at this session of the General Assembly we would all be in a position to look back over a year during which we would not only have continued to develop the work in our areas of accomplishment, but when we would also be in a position to look forward to the prospect of building on new foundations addressing issues of importance.

Despite the positive work being done in the context of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BWC); the agreement in the Conference on Disarmament to negotiate a fissile materials treaty; the outcome of the summit meeting between the Presidents of the United States and the Russian Federation; the Strategic Defence Review undertaken by the United Kingdom and the indications of transparency which that contains; the imminent entry into force of both the Convention on the total banning of anti-personnel mines and the amended Protocol II of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or To Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW); 1998 has also been a year of disturbing developments, especially in the areas of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation, developments which will have a significant impact as we attempt to chart a course into the next millennium, a course which will ensure that the peoples of the world can live in a safer and more secure environment without the threat of weapons of mass destruction and excessive accumulations of conventional arms and light weapons clouding their existence.

The nuclear test explosions conducted in South Asia and their potential impact on nuclear disarmament were of considerable concern to my Government. We have expressed ourselves on this issue and I here reiterate the statements that have been made by the South African Government. South Africa has also joined in a number of initiatives, including at the Conference on Disarmament and at the recently held General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), to express our concern. We continue to call on India and Pakistan to exercise maximum restraint and to continue their dialogue to promote mutual confidence. My Government is also on record as welcoming the General Assembly statements by the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and India in which they indicated progress in their becoming parties to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Our opposition to nuclear tests is not only a reflection of the views of the South African Government but is a long sought after goal of the international community as a whole, which had hoped that the conclusion of the CTBT would remove this phenomenon from our midst. It should also be noted that as a country which has itself stepped away from the nuclear-weapons abyss and as a State party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), we are firmly committed to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and to their complete elimination. As long as a single nuclear weapon remains in existence it is our belief that these weapons constitute a threat to humanity.

A source of concern for South Africa this year has also been the continuing refusal to recognize that the entire international community has an interest in and a concern about nuclear disarmament, a refusal which has *inter alia* led to an inability to have this interest and concern accommodated in such forums as the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and the strengthened review process of the NPT. This is also despite the fact that South Africa and many other participants in these meetings have made it clear that these proposals are being made and would be undertaken without undermining or threatening the nuclear disarmament negotiations between the Russian Federation and the United States, which would continue to be of paramount importance to the reduction of nuclear weapons and their eventual elimination — as would future negotiations involving the other three nuclear-weapon States. What is being sought is for the international community, represented by the Conference on Disarmament and the NPT, to have focused deliberations on the practical steps for systematic and progressive efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons.

The concern that I have outlined here was further exacerbated by the unsuccessful conclusion of the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the NPT review conference. South Africa will continue to pursue the proposals it made at the 1998 Preparatory Committee when the Committee meets again next year. It is also our hope that the Preparatory Committee at its 1999 session will

regain the ground that has been lost and will successfully conclude its work. We will work together with all our NPT partners to attain this objective, especially in view of the new challenge that has confronted us.

President Nelson Mandela, addressing this session of the General Assembly, gave a clear exposition of the South African positions on nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. He recalled that the first resolution of the General Assembly sought to address the challenge of

> "the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction". (*resolution 1 (I), para. 5 (c)*)

But he went on to note that after countless initiatives and resolutions the international community still does not have concrete and generally accepted proposals, supported by a clear commitment by the nuclear-weapon States, for the speedy, final and total elimination of nuclear weapons and nuclear-weapons capabilities.

President Mandela saluted — as we also do today — Brazil's decision to accede to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and urged all others that had not yet done so to follow that excellent example. He asked the question, while admitting that it might sound naive to those who had elaborated sophisticated arguments to justify their refusal to eliminate these terrible and terrifying weapons of mass destruction, "why do they need them, anyway?" (*A/53/PV.7, p. 15*). President Mandela stated that in reality no rational answer could be advanced to explain in a satisfactory manner what in the end was a consequence of cold war inertia and an attachment to the use of the threat of brute force to assert the primacy of some States over others.

It is also a pleasure for me to bring to the Committee's attention, as the Ambassador of Mexico did earlier today, the fact that, together with its partners in the 9 June 1998 joint ministerial declaration on the need for a new agenda to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free world — Brazil, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia and Sweden — South Africa will be presenting a draft resolution (A/C.1/53/L.48) for consideration by the First Committee. The Declaration and draft resolution are intended to put forward a realistic and achievable agenda for the attainment of nuclear disarmament. It is intended to identify the middle ground and to avoid the trap of inaction created by the two poles which have for too long dominated the nuclear disarmament debate and which have only delivered further polarization and demonstrated a paucity of results.

The time has come to look at a new approach that would unite the middle ground trapped between the maximalist and minimalist positions. This approach would need squarely to recognize the challenges facing us; would not deny the steps that have been and are continuing to be taken; would not avoid difficult issues, while also not seeking confrontation; and would seek to form the basis for a common approach for the achievement of the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons through existing unilateral and bilateral processes and through complementary and mutually reinforcing steps at the plurilateral and multilateral levels.

President Nelson Mandela, when announcing South Africa's participation in this initiative, stated forthrightly that the draft resolution, which is appropriately entitled "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: the need for a new agenda", is an honest attempt to contribute to the definition of the systematic and progressive steps required to eliminate nuclear weapons and the threat of annihilation which they pose. He called on all Members of the United Nations seriously to consider this important draft resolution and to give it their support.

I should now like to turn to a number of other important issues which South Africa wishes to highlight and which will be dealt with during the course of our deliberations.

South Africa welcomed the decision taken at the Conference on Disarmament to establish the Ad Hoc Committee under item 1 of the agenda, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", a Committee that will be negotiating the fissile materials treaty on the basis of the Shannon Report (CD/1299) and the mandate contained therein. The commencement and early conclusion of the fissile materials treaty negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament has long been an objective of the South African Government. The fissile materials treaty, as the next major multilateral negotiation following the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, is an integral part of the nuclear disarmament section of the principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament adopted at the 1995 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review and Extension Conference. South Africa sees the negotiations on a fissile materials treaty as being of particular importance given the key nature of fissile material as a component of nuclear weapons.

From our perspective, the negotiations that the Conference on Disarmament is about to commence lie at the heart of the nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation issue. By achieving control over fissile material for weapons purposes we will not only be in a position to prevent the production of further nuclear weapons, but we will also be in a position to lay the groundwork for their eventual elimination. South Africa's approach to the negotiations for a fissile material treaty will be based on the objective that the treaty to be negotiated must be an integral measure of both nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. While recognizing the difficulties that surround the issues relating to existing military stockpiles of fissile material, we intend to raise the stockpiles issue, as is provided for in the Shannon Report, and will, together with the other members of the Conference on Disarmament, seek the most appropriate ways of dealing with the matter.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Preparatory Committee and its provisional technical secretariat continue to make significant strides in the implementation of the Treaty's verification regime. South Africa lends its voice to the voices of other States in calling for all States to sign the Treaty and to work constructively for its earliest entry into force. As I have already said, South Africa welcomes the recent statement by Pakistan about its readiness to sign the CTBT and the statement by India about its willingness to continue its discussions on the signing of that Treaty.

South Africa will also continue to use its participation in the First Committee to further reinforce its support for initiatives to increase the area of the world covered by nuclear-weapon-free zones. We will also continue to give our support to the initiative to promote the southern hemisphere as a zone free from nuclear weapons.

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC) serves as an example of the work that can be achieved by the international community within the disarmament context. My delegation has noted with satisfaction the success of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in implementing the Convention by conducting successful inspections among member States, and the cooperation that has been extended by the States Parties in this regard. South Africa also welcomes the increasing number of ratifications of the CWC and further calls on all States which have not done so to ratify or accede to the CWC in order to broaden its universal application.

The intensification of the work of the BWC Ad Hoc Group, which has clearly been demonstrated by the negotiators this year and by their agreement on an intensive work programme for 1999, is also to be welcomed. South Africa is fully committed to these negotiations and to achieving a protocol that will be effective in strengthening the Convention's implementation. The conclusion of the work of the Ad Hoc Group will, however, depend on the continued commitment and substantive, as well as flexible, participation of all States Parties to the Treaty. We are convinced that the Ad Hoc Group will be able to complete its work within the time-frame agreed at the Treaty's last Review Conference.

While arms control has traditionally focused on conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction, the devastation wrought by the proliferation of light weapons and small arms on socio-economic development generally, and specifically in the reconstruction of post-conflict societies, can no longer be ignored. Unimpeded access to and the use of light weapons and small arms within States has increased the lethality of crime, violence, banditry and civil disobedience. The demobilization of ex-combatants, disarmament programmes and other initiatives in regions which have suffered through conflict situations are constrained by the existence of large amounts of these weapons which are poorly regulated and indiscriminately used. The diffusion of existing stocks and the flow of new weapons endanger the democratic transformations that are being sought and have a negative influence on the ability of Governments to govern effectively.

The challenge in addressing the proliferation of light weapons and small arms is to marshal the necessary human and financial resources, encouraging the sharing of reliable data among national departments and regional partners, coordinating action, and, by raising the profile of the issue, to gain the support of Governments, politicians and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, the illicit proliferation of small arms is closely linked to other criminal activities and therefore must be addressed within the context of initiatives aimed at reducing crime. The close link between licit and illicit weapons must also be recognized and approaches to addressing the one must relate to the other, both within countries and in regional initiatives.

South Africa therefore believes that a holistic approach is necessary to address this problem. Concurrent action must be taken at national, regional and international levels, focusing both on licit and illicit small arms and light weapons. To reinforce national action it is imperative that

a regional approach, addressing the concerns of individual regions and adopting an incremental approach, should be formulated to address the problem of uncontrolled proliferation of these weapons. This will ensure that as each region of the world develops an indigenous approach, the building blocks will be put in place to effectively deal with this issue globally.

The focus areas in all instances should therefore be placed on illicit and licit small arms and light weapons. National and regional approaches must be developed for both short-term and long-term gains. At the national level efforts should be focused on enhancing legislation and regulation to prevent legal arms from becoming illegal through criminal activity; improving as necessary the regulation of the importation, export and transfer of light weapons and small arms; and by increasing the control over stocks of light weapons belonging to security forces. Steps should also be taken to reduce the number of existing weapons through voluntary methods and increasing the capacity of security forces to identify, seize and destroy illicit weapons.

Regionally, an important confidence-building measure that would lead to long-term gains for regional cooperation and trust is greater transparency by countries in their transfers of small arms and light weapons. In affected regions, States and regional organizations should also take immediate steps to stop the inflow of these weapons through increased cooperation, harmonization of transfer procedures, tighter border control and intelligence-sharing. Attention should also be focused on the recirculation of existing stocks throughout the region, and appropriate control measures should be devised, including increased cooperation between Governments, joint operations and harmonization of priorities.

A cooperative partnership should be established between Governments, international and regional organizations and the non-governmental community, to mobilize public and political support. The role of the non-governmental community in assisting Governments to achieve this support and aiding in the compilation of reliable data regarding small arms and light weapons proliferation in all its aspects should be explored fully. It is South Africa's view that an international conference on small arms and light weapons should be held after 1999 to enable Governments and regional organizations to share their experiences and facilitate dialogue. The aim of the conference should be to increase cooperation and avoid duplication of initiatives to ensure that scarce resources are used effectively. The conference should formulate an action plan to combat this proliferation problem based on the experiences of indigenous regional approaches in this regard. Such regional approaches will have put in place measures that will allow us effectively to deal with this issue globally.

During this session of the First Committee my delegation will continue to support draft resolutions dealing with the conventional arms, small arms and light weapons issues, using as a basis for our participation the views that I have outlined. In this context, it is also important to note that South Africa continues to encourage all Members of the United Nations to support and regularly participate in the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms. The Register remains a very important tool in building transparency and confidence.

South Africa was delighted when Burkina Faso deposited the fortieth ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, triggering the Ottawa treaty's entry-into-force mechanism. The next significant milestone in the fulfilment and implementation of all the objectives of the treaty will be the first meeting of States parties. South Africa would here like to take the opportunity of welcoming and giving its support to the offer made by the Foreign Minister of Mozambique during the general debate in the General Assembly for his country to be the venue of the first meeting of States parties. We give this support not only because Mozambique is a close neighbour and friend, but also because holding the meeting in one of the countries which have been the most afflicted by the scourge of anti-personnel landmines will serve as a further reminder to all members of the international community of how these weapons are devastating the lives of innocent civilians around the world. South Africa will work closely and actively with Mozambique and with the other members of the treaty to encourage those States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify it in order that they will be in a position to join us in Maputo as full members of the international norm against the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction.

As the delegations participating in the First Committee debate, formulate and adopt resolutions that will guide us and our work during 1999, South Africa remains committed to working in this Committee, and in all other disarmament and non-proliferation forums, to achieve our common goal of eliminating all weapons of mass destruction and limiting the numbers of conventional weapons, small arms and light

weapons to those required for self-defence and other legitimate uses.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): The Bangladesh delegation warmly felicitates you, Sir, on your election to the chair and offers you its fullest cooperation. We thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his comprehensive statement earlier this morning.

The contemporary international political climate has elements that can be propitious for disarmament. A broad consensus on some key issues is emerging. These existing opportunities must be seized. New approaches towards arms limitation and disarmament must be explored while we steer clear of outmoded strategy concepts and doctrines of the past.

There now exists a perceptible and indeed expanding international consensus that favours the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. The Hague appeal for peace, calling for delegitimization of war, reflects the conscience of mankind. The indefinite extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC), and the imminent entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction are landmark achievements in this sphere in current times. The agreement finally reached on starting negotiations for a fissile material cut-off treaty is also a step forward.

In many ways this is a critical watershed point. Capabilities enjoin responsibilities. We urge all nuclear-weapon States and the nuclear-weapon-capable States in all regions to pursue in good faith negotiations leading to the ultimate goal of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. The hands of the doomsday clock should not be allowed to move forward again.

Bangladesh's commitment to the goal of general and complete disarmament is unequivocal. Indeed, it is with us a constitutional obligation. Our adherence to major disarmament treaties flows from this. It is also for this reason, among others, that we accord such high priority to nuclear disarmament. To this end we have supported, as we shall continue to support, all efforts leading towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

The NPT called for negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the elimination of nuclear weapons at an early date. That was in 1968. Today, 30 years later, the international community is yet to agree on a time-bound elimination of nuclear weapons. Even General Assembly resolutions have urged the Conference on Disarmament to commence negotiations on a phased programme of nuclear disarmament for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons within a time-bound framework through legally binding instruments.

The Conference on Disarmament must heed these aspirations of the global community. Bangladesh is of the view that substantive negotiations on total and comprehensive nuclear disarmament should commence forthwith in the Conference on Disarmament. An ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament must be set up to address this crucial issue.

The use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is contrary to international law. Bangladesh attaches high importance to security assurances, which are a matter of great interest to all non-nuclear States. Indeed, they are an essential element in keeping them that way. The total elimination of nuclear weapons undoubtedly remains the best security assurance against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. We welcome in this regard the re-establishment in the Conference on Disarmament of the Ad Hoc Committee on negative security assurances.

As an active member of the Conference on Disarmament Bangladesh remains committed to contributing to discussions, deliberations, debate and substantive negotiations on a broad range of disarmament and non-proliferation issues.

The prevention of an arms race in outer space is an issue which of late has gained appropriate attention in the Conference. Outer space is the common heritage of mankind, which should be used for peaceful purposes benefiting all nations. This final frontier should be spared the experience of a self-defeating arms race. Bangladesh therefore supports all efforts towards an international agreement preventing the weaponization of outer space.

The entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, with its sophisticated verification regime, has strengthened our resolve to reinforce the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BWC) with similar verification mechanisms. Bangladesh attaches considerable significance

to the work of the Ad Hoc Group which is mandated to negotiate a protocol to strengthen the Convention by developing effective verification and compliance mechanisms. Bangladesh welcomed the initiative of Australia to convene an informal meeting on this in New York last month, and joined with others in issuing a forward-looking Declaration. There appears to exist sufficient political will, and we believe the Ad Hoc Group will be able to fulfil its mandate within the agreed time-frame.

The open sale of small arms is a matter of serious concern. While the major armies of the world are disarming civilians are rearming. If these weapons are not properly controlled peace will not be a reality in the true sense in our lives. The excessive and destabilizing accumulation and transfer of small arms has led to enormous human tragedies and economic and social problems. These problems are exacerbated by the absence of global norms, or standards, to be used in deducing such accumulation or transfer. It is imperative that the international community address this problem as a matter of the utmost importance and urgency.

One approach to this problem would be to seek to build a global consensus on monitoring and controlling illicit arms transfers and their links with trafficking in other contraband goods. The holding of a United Nations conference on all aspects of the illicit arms trade in the near future would be an important step in that direction. The initiative that was taken by the Foreign Ministers of Norway and Canada to hold an informal session on the trafficking and illicit use of small arms last month in the United Nations is indeed laudable.

We call for the early convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. It is time that the international community reviewed the implementation of the Final Document of the tenth special session of the General Assembly — the first special session devoted to disarmament — as well as the outcomes of the subsequent special sessions, and took stock of the international security and disarmament situation in the post-cold-war era. While nuclear disarmament should remain our highest priority, we have to identify the emerging challenges presented by the new era and to formulate an agreed plan of action to deal with these in the true spirit of multilateralism. We believe that only a special session of the General Assembly can address the subject of disarmament, taking into account in particular its relationship with development, with such comprehensiveness and thoroughness as it deserves.

The First Committee of the General Assembly is focused on the furtherance of one of the fundamental objectives of the United Nations, the maintenance of international peace and security. The strengthening of United Nations competence in the field of disarmament would therefore require effective coordination between this Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the Disarmament Commission. The non-governmental organizations interested in this field play an important advocacy and awareness-raising role in promoting the cause of global disarmament. The valuable inputs of civil society can be put to much better use through the well-defined arrangement of constructive coordination between that society and the United Nations. We are pleased with the creation of a Department for Disarmament Affairs and want it to take a very proactive role in the sphere of disarmament. One area for such a role would be to activate the United Nations Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament. We believe that the operations of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific should move to the region soon. There is no justification for the Centre's being run from New York. Financial constraints arguments do not seem plausible.

In the First Committee, as in the Conference on Disarmament, Bangladesh has always pursued a balanced and constructive posture, viewing issues on their merits rather than basing ourselves on prior positions. At the present session we will continue to follow that tradition.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): My delegation is pleased to see you, Sir, presiding over the First Committee during this fifty-third session of the General Assembly. We are confident that given your well-known skills and expertise, you will be able to steer the work of the Committee to a fruitful conclusion. My delegation extends its fullest support and cooperation towards that end.

We thank the Secretary-General for the important and focused remarks he made to the Committee this morning.

The situation on the disarmament front in the past year has been a rather dismal one. This was noted by the Non-Aligned Movement summit meeting in its Final Document, to which my delegation fully subscribes and supports. There has been an important breakthrough in the area of conventional disarmament, in the form of the successful and laudable signing of the Convention on landmines, but there has been no discernible progress in the area of nuclear disarmament. The nuclear Powers continue to take the attitude that the issue of nuclear disarmament is best left

to them to negotiate. Yet to date there has been no real progress on that front. The START II process continues to be in limbo, awaiting ratification by the Russian Duma. Until that happens there will be no further movement in the direction of START III.

In the meantime there has been a further setback following the series of nuclear tests that were carried out in South Asia. These tests are a matter of serious regional and global concern as they carry with them the dangerous prospects of nuclear proliferation, thereby undermining the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). These tests should serve as a wake-up call for the international community, especially the nuclear-weapon States, to exert every effort to ensure that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is stopped at all costs, and immediately. A constructive approach on their part would be for them to cease all activities pertaining to the vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons, a loophole which they negotiated for themselves in the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). They cannot hope to fully convince the non-nuclear-weapon States that their security is best served by forswearing nuclear weapons when they, the nuclear-weapon States themselves, not only continue to keep them in large numbers but continue to "improve" the destructive power of these weapons of mass destruction.

It is an undeniable fact that, whether we like it or not, there are today seven declared nuclear-weapon States. There is at least one undeclared nuclear-weapon State and perhaps there are a few others which aspire to join the club for reasons of national security, if not prestige. It is, therefore, imperative for the tests in South Asia to be seen not purely in terms of a regional dynamic, and rationalized as such, but in the overall context of global nuclear disarmament, which should be addressed globally. The nuclear-weapon States have a particular responsibility to respond appropriately to this development. They must demonstrate in a convincing way their strong and continued commitment to the goals of nuclear disarmament as embodied in the NPT, by embarking on serious negotiations towards the reduction of their nuclear arsenals, leading to their ultimate elimination. Their clear obligations in this respect, particularly under article VI of the NPT, have been clearly asserted by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion on the *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*. Unless there is a clear perception, especially by States aspiring to nuclear capability, that the nuclear-weapon States are serious in their intention to achieve the goals of nuclear disarmament, the world will, willy-nilly, slide down the path of nuclear proliferation.

My delegation therefore urges the nuclear-weapon States to take a more constructive attitude towards meeting their obligations and responsibilities under both the NPT and the CTBT and demonstrate unambiguously their commitment to achieve all the goals of nuclear disarmament. It would be helpful if they began by evincing a more cooperative approach to nuclear disarmament initiatives taken by the non-nuclear-weapon States, rather than dismissing them, as they have been wont to do until now, as unrealistic and naive efforts on the part of the nuclear "have-nots".

Efforts should also be made to forge a cooperative rather than an adversarial approach in nuclear disarmament. Such an approach would at least ensure a more productive outcome at the next NPT Preparatory Committee session than, regrettably, was the case at the last, thereby paving the way for a successful review process of the NPT in the year 2000. This is essential in an effort to arrest further erosion of confidence in the Treaty, which is already beginning to appear in some quarters.

The NPT review process should seriously address the quantitative and qualitative aspects of nuclear disarmament, lack of real progress in nuclear disarmament and accountability of the nuclear-weapon States in respect of both the review process and full implementation of the NPT. In the wake of recent developments, efforts must be made to further strengthen this important non-proliferation regime. The alternative is fraught with unacceptable risks.

At the same time, greater efforts should be made to ensure early ratification of the CTBT so as to pave the way for its entry into force by the target date. My delegation welcomes the ratification of the Treaty by the United Kingdom and France. It welcomes, in particular, the willingness of both India and Pakistan to sign the Treaty within a year and hopes that this undertaking will be fulfilled. My delegation urges the other parties concerned to ratify the Treaty without delay. This is imperative if it is to be an effective instrument in banning nuclear tests for all time. For its part, Malaysia signed the Treaty in July this year as a reaffirmation of its consistent support for nuclear disarmament measures and steps are being taken for its ratification in spite of our unhappiness over certain aspects of the Treaty. As part of the international monitoring system of the Treaty, Malaysia will be hosting a radionuclide monitoring station, with the Malaysian Institute of Nuclear Technology Research acting as the national agency for overseeing the implementation of the requirements of the Treaty. As in the case of the NPT,

every effort should also be made towards securing universal adherence to the CTBT.

In contributing to the nuclear disarmament process my delegation, through the draft resolution pertaining to the ICJ advisory opinion on the *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* which it has initiated in the past two years and will again initiate at this session of the General Assembly, has called for the commencement of negotiations on nuclear disarmament that will eventually lead to the conclusion of a nuclear-weapons convention. In the wake of the criminalization of all activities relating to chemical and biological weapons through specific conventions, it is only logical and appropriate that a comprehensive convention on nuclear weapons, the most catastrophic weapons of mass destruction imaginable, should be aimed at in the long term, in the interest of ensuring the continued survival of the human species on this planet. While a model draft convention, prepared by leading international nuclear disarmament experts is already in circulation as a basis of discussion, my delegation is not suggesting immediate negotiations on such a convention at this stage. We believe the road towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons will be a long and arduous one and will be best travelled through a series of well-defined stages, accompanied by proper verification and control mechanisms. Such an approach is, therefore, not incompatible with the step-by-step, incremental approaches already mooted by others, including the Non-Aligned Movement, and should therefore be looked at with a positive and constructive attitude by the nuclear-weapon States. My delegation will have more to say on this in the Committee when it initiates its draft resolution on the ICJ advisory opinion on the *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*.

Towards that ultimate goal negotiations should be stepped up on the various aspects of nuclear disarmament at the Conference on Disarmament. Regrettably, the Conference on Disarmament has remained stalemated on the issue of establishing an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. We welcome, however, its recent decision to establish two Ad Hoc Committees, one dealing with fissile material cut-off and the other pertaining to negative security assurances. We earnestly hope that the two Ad Hoc Committees will be re-established every year almost automatically and that all the parties concerned will negotiate in good faith in the coming months and years so as to enable early agreement to be arrived at on these two important aspects of nuclear disarmament. Malaysia is keen to play an active and constructive role in these negotiations and looks forward to its early admission as a full member of the Conference on Disarmament.

My delegation is particularly concerned about the inherent danger of a thermonuclear war triggered by accident or through terrorism. This should provide a further incentive for the international community to work towards the rapid reduction and early elimination of nuclear weapons. In the meantime, efforts should be made to avoid or eliminate such risks. In this regard my delegation welcomes the proposal made by the Canberra Commission, and supported by the recent eight-nation initiative here in the United Nations, to dealert all nuclear forces. We welcome in particular what amounts to a dealerting posture taken by the United Kingdom in respect of its submarine-based nuclear forces. It should be lauded as a positive contribution, especially in the context of reducing the possibility of nuclear war by accident. At the same time, we call on countries possessing nuclear weapons to enhance the security of their nuclear facilities through more stringent national, physical and technical means and/or international cooperation.

While the main disarmament focus should remain on nuclear disarmament, the proliferation of small arms, which has grown out of proportion in recent years, is a matter of serious concern to my delegation and is one of the most challenging issues with which the international community will have to come to grips. While they have a role in legitimate national defence, their proliferation destabilizes societies and spawns terrorism. The international community should intensify cooperation in controlling the flow of these weapons through increased efforts at transparency, such as through the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, in which more than 90 countries, including my own, participate. My delegation supports efforts to promote the universal use of the Register. We also support the proposal to increase public awareness of the problem of small arms through the convening of an international conference.

Malaysia welcomes the impending entry into force of the Ottawa treaty banning anti-personnel landmines with the deposition of the fortieth instrument of ratification at the United Nations recently. We hail the promptness with which the Treaty comes into force, less than a year after it was opened for signature, which is indeed a remarkable achievement reflecting overwhelming universal support for the treaty. Malaysia, which was among the initial signatories to the Treaty, is taking steps towards its early ratification.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to pay tribute to the Department for Disarmament Affairs under the leadership of Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala.

Under his able and dynamic stewardship the Department has successfully refocused the attention of the Organization on the important issue of disarmament in a way that has not been possible in recent years. We believe the newly revamped and upgraded Department will make an important contribution to the Secretary-General's efforts to inculcate a new culture of global peace, which he has so eloquently articulated and in which process the United Nations will play a pivotal role. We wish the Department every success and extend our fullest support and cooperation in its various activities.

These are some of my delegation's comments on several aspects of the issues before us. It is not comprehensive in its coverage as we intend to make additional specific comments on other aspects of the disarmament issue in the course of our debate.

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): My delegation would like to start by expressing to you, Mr. Chairman, our warmest congratulations on your election to lead the First Committee. We are convinced that under your wise guidance our work will be very successful. You can rely on our firm support to that end. We extend our congratulations also to the other members of the Bureau.

At the same time, my delegation wishes to express its most sincere thanks to Mr. Mothusi Nkgowe for his very able and efficient guidance of the Committee during the fifty-second session.

Many of the expectations created by the end of the cold war have now faded. Regrettably, some factors and doctrines that fuelled the East-West confrontation have survived the changes in the international system. Nuclear weapons, which have never had any justification and still have no justification, continue to pose a threat to peace, stability and the very survival of mankind. That is why the virtual paralysis of the nuclear disarmament process is a cause of great concern for the international community.

My country has vehemently opposed and continues to oppose nuclear testing in all its forms. The tests carried out this year highlight once again the urgent need to eliminate nuclear weapons, as well as the real and immediate danger that they represent. The international community must continue to work to reach agreements on a phased programme, within a specific time-frame, for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and the prohibition of their development, production, acquisition, testing, stockpiling, transfer, use and threat of use.

We are pleased that agreement has been reached in the Conference on Disarmament on the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee for the negotiation of a convention on the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices. We are convinced that negotiations on this issue must address both the elimination of existing fissile material and the prohibition of future production. We are confident that the agreement on the committee's establishment will facilitate progress towards the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament.

We note with great interest, and support, the Declaration adopted by a group of countries on 9 June 1998, "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: the need for a new agenda". This Declaration, together with other initiatives proposed by the Non-Aligned Movement, constitutes an important contribution towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

We wish to reaffirm the priority and importance that we attach to nuclear-weapon States' giving all non-nuclear-weapon States negative security assurances that are universal, unconditional and binding. We are confident that the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee for this purpose in the Conference on Disarmament will result in progress on this matter.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) continues to be a key element for non-proliferation and disarmament. To this end, nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty must fully comply in good faith with their commitments, particularly those contained in article VI. The Preparatory Committee and the 2000 Review Conference of the NPT must implement the obligations under the Treaty as well as the commitments contained in the document of principles and objectives and the resolution on the Middle East. We note with satisfaction Brazil's accession to the NPT.

In addition to the nuclear-weapon-free zones established by the Treaties of Tlatelolco, Rarotonga, the Antarctic, Pelindaba and Bangkok, there are various other initiatives with the same goal, including is the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central Asia and Mongolia's initiative to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in that country. Colombia also supports the proposal to free the southern hemisphere of nuclear weapons and the proposal to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, in conformity with the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

We welcome the growing number of ratifications of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC). My Government has been making progress in the ratification process, and we hope to complete it as soon as possible. We are convinced that, as with other international conventions on weapons of mass destruction, the Convention's credibility and effectiveness will largely depend on achieving universality.

We are also pleased to highlight the progress in the negotiations on the protocol to improve the implementation and effectiveness of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction (BWC), and the decision of the fourth Review Conference urging the conclusion of negotiations within the Ad Hoc Group as soon as possible. My country co-sponsored the ministerial Declaration adopted in New York on 23 September 1998 expressing firm support for the work of the Ad Hoc Group so that it can fulfil all aspects of its mandate.

I take this opportunity to recall that last August the Congress of Colombia adopted the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or To Have Indiscriminate Effects and the four related Protocols. It is now before the Constitutional Court, the last step of the ratification process.

It is a source of satisfaction to note that with the first 40 ratifications of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction the way has now been cleared for its entry into force on 1 March 1999, in conformity with the provisions of article 17. My Government has already submitted the Convention to Congress for ratification.

The illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and their accumulation and proliferation constitute a serious threat to peoples and to regional and national security; contribute to aggravating tensions that lead to internal struggles; and have a negative impact on the economic development of the countries concerned. There is wide recognition of the links between criminal organizations operating all over the world and involved in the illicit arms trade, drug-trafficking, money-laundering and terrorism. In the western hemisphere last year a binding instrument was adopted, the Inter-American Convention Against the Production and Illicit Trafficking of Firearms, Munitions, Explosives and Other Related Materials.

The time has come for the international community to consider action-oriented recommendations to combat the destabilizing trafficking in small arms, as a starting point for the negotiation of a global convention. Such an international convention must commit States to adopt legislative measures for domestic control of firearms, munitions and explosives, as an essential prerequisite to avoid the criminal use of these weapons and their diversion through clandestine and illicit channels. Similarly, an agreement on this topic should contain the necessary mechanisms to ensure compliance.

As the illicit trafficking in arms takes place in an underground economy consisting of international criminal organizations with information and communication channels and finance and distribution networks, it is clear that the war against this scourge must be waged with a global perspective. Therefore, as my country stated in its response to the Secretary-General on this issue, we firmly support the convening of an international conference on the illicit arms trade as soon as possible.

My country also supports the initiative to add a protocol on measures to fight illicit arms-trafficking to the convention against transnational organized crime to be negotiated within the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

Lastly, my delegation wishes to reaffirm its support for the holding of a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament (SSOD IV). We are convinced that this is the appropriate forum to analyse the course of future action on disarmament issues, arms control and other matters related to international security. We are also convinced of the importance of multilateralism in the disarmament process and of the need to secure the full participation of all members of the international community in the preparation and celebration of SSOD IV.

Mr. Than (Myanmar): May I begin by extending the warmest congratulations of the delegation of Myanmar to you, Sir, on your unanimous election to the chair of the First Committee. Our tribute also goes to the other members of the Bureau.

When we look at the horizon of arms control and disarmament as we commence the work of the First Committee at the fifty-third session, the picture that comes into view is not very encouraging or cheerful; it is not a

bright one altogether. It is a mosaic. The overall picture is rather dark, sombre and dismal. Many regions and areas in the picture are pitch dark. Some are in dim and grim light. Only a few areas give out some gleaming lights.

Nuclear disarmament is at an impasse. Bilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations between the United States and the Russian Federation seem to have lost steam for the time being. START II still remains unratified by the Russian Federation. We all wish to see the speedy entry into force of the START II Treaty and its full implementation by the two major nuclear-weapon States. We also urge them to reinvigorate their bilateral negotiation process and to proceed with the START III negotiations as soon as possible.

It is not that we do not recognize the concrete measures taken by the nuclear-weapon States in the past. We do recall with appreciation the deep reductions made by the two major nuclear-weapon States in their nuclear arsenals to date, and the unilateral measures taken by some nuclear-weapon States. But one should not just glory in one's past achievements and remain complacent. One must move with the times and carry out the urgent, important tasks that lie ahead.

At the historic Review and Extension Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), held in New York in April and May 1995, the States parties, including the nuclear-weapon States, made solemn and momentous commitments to, among other things, the determined pursuit by the nuclear-weapon States of systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with the ultimate aim of eliminating them, and to consider taking further steps to assure non-nuclear-weapon States parties against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, which could take the form of an internationally and legally binding instrument.

It is regrettable to note that some nuclear-weapon States are not living up to these commitments. These solemn commitments are not even frequently referred to or reaffirmed in their statements. When such references are made by these States occasionally, the statements are perfunctory and unenthusiastic.

The reluctance of some nuclear-weapon States to make advances on these two important issues is evident from their continued opposition to the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament in the Conference on Disarmament and to the negotiation of an internationally and legally binding instrument on security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States. The same lack of political will on the part of some nuclear-weapon States to move forward on these issues is conspicuous at the Preparatory Committee meetings for the 2000 NPT Review Conference. Strong opposition at these meetings by some nuclear-weapon States to the formulation of even a moderate draft rolling text on nuclear disarmament, security assurances and related issues at these meetings is most regrettable. The second Preparatory Committee session, which was supposed to start substantive preparatory work for the 2000 NPT Review Conference, was a dismal failure.

A series of underground nuclear-test explosions conducted in South Asia in May this year proved that the NPT regime is not fully effective in containing the nuclear genie. These nuclear tests have caused international concern. As a matter of policy, Myanmar opposes any nuclear-test explosions by any country in any environment. We favour the cessation of all nuclear-test explosions in all environments for all time. The recent nuclear-test explosions in South Asia are not simply an issue of nuclear tests. They have raised a much deeper issue. If the nuclear-weapon States continue to be reluctant to fulfil their obligation with regard to nuclear disarmament and maintain their uncompromising attitude, will the NPT be sustainable, and can it be really effective in curbing the further proliferation of nuclear weapons? It is inherent in human nature and in the dynamics of nuclear proliferation that if the nuclear-weapon States cling to the perpetual possession of nuclear weapons and continue to place a high value on nuclear deterrence, it will only sharpen the appetite of the threshold States to acquire nuclear weapons, overtly or covertly.

In this regard, we need to adopt a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, non-nuclear-weapon States must refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons. On the other hand, the nuclear-weapon States must fulfil their obligation to take more effective nuclear disarmament measures leading to the total elimination of these weapons. An international legal norm placing a total ban on nuclear weapons must be established and effectively enforced. Nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation are indivisible and must go hand in hand.

Because of that attitude and the reluctance of some nuclear-weapon States to make advances on nuclear disarmament, there exists a credibility gap between the nuclear-weapon States and non-nuclear-weapon States. The nuclear-weapon States must bridge this credibility gap by their actual deeds and concrete measures.

Item 1 on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament is "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", yet the Conference on Disarmament has been denied its proper role of carrying out multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament. In the face of such an impasse on nuclear disarmament, we need to search for a new agenda that will give an impetus to international efforts for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free world. Myanmar stands ready to work together with other like-minded countries to arrive at a viable new agenda for nuclear disarmament.

In our view, such a new agenda should include dealerting and deactivating nuclear weapons and the removal of nuclear warheads from these weapons in the arsenals of nuclear-weapon States; the conclusion, as a first step, of a universal and legally binding multilateral agreement, committing all States to the objective of the total elimination of nuclear weapons; the conclusion of an internationally and legally binding instrument of the joint undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States not to be the first to use nuclear weapons; the conclusion of an international convention on fissile materials; and the conclusion of an internationally and legally binding instrument on security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon States.

Dealerting and deactivating nuclear weapons and removing the nuclear warheads from these weapons in the nuclear arsenals of the nuclear-weapon States is a crucial immediate step. This will reduce the risk of unauthorized use, war by miscalculation or accident and the risk of precipitate decision-making to use nuclear weapons. In times of crisis this will give a much needed precious time lag that could be effectively used for conflict resolution and for the avoidance of nuclear war.

Another very important immediate step is the conclusion of an internationally and legally binding instrument enshrining the joint undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States not to be the first to use nuclear weapons. Such an unambiguous agreement on no first use, reflected in military doctrines and force deployments, and strict adherence to it by the nuclear-weapon States, will in effect prevent the use of nuclear weapons and the outbreak of nuclear war. For, if the role of nuclear weapons is limited to deterring their use by others, the use of nuclear weapons itself will lapse. The reduction of reliance on nuclear weapons under such an agreement will constitute a significant measure of de-emphasizing the role of nuclear weapons and will contribute to the advancement of the cause of nuclear arms control and nuclear disarmament.

These important immediate steps, among other things, are embraced in Myanmar's traditional draft resolution on nuclear disarmament, which we, together with other sponsors, will put forward at the current session. The main thrust of the draft resolution will be once again the reiteration of our call for a phased programme of nuclear disarmament leading to the total elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified time frame. It is hoped that our draft resolution will receive the widest support of Member States this year.

The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 8 July 1996 on the *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* is of great importance. It constitutes a significant contribution to the cause of nuclear arms control and nuclear disarmament as well as to the development of international law. My delegation believes that, in view of the importance of the question of no first use of nuclear weapons, it may be worth while to seek another advisory opinion of the Court, by a General Assembly resolution, on the legality of the first use of nuclear weapons. My delegation is working with other interested delegations on this question.

One area with some gleaming lights in the overall dreary picture is that of the fissile material cut-off treaty. We welcome the establishment in the Conference on Disarmament of the Ad Hoc Committee on the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

The Conference on Disarmament — the sole multilateral negotiating forum dealing with disarmament — has lived up to its reputation until now and has delivered concrete results whenever we give it an adequate mandate and the necessary political support. Its role must be strengthened in order that it may be able to respond to the needs of our time for the negotiation of a series of multilateral agreements on a range of issues. Our preference is, of course, to have an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament established in the Conference on Disarmament at the beginning of its 1999 session. However, in the event that consensus can be reached at its next year's session only on the re-establishment of ad hoc committees on a fissile material cut-off treaty and negative security assurances but not on other agenda items, the same treatment should be given to nuclear disarmament as to the other remaining agenda items. The possibilities must be explored of reaching agreement on the establishment of appropriate mechanisms on nuclear disarmament and the other remaining agenda items, including the appointment of special coordinators.

We believe that it is necessary and appropriate for there to be a limited enlargement of the Conference on Disarmament at this juncture in order to reflect present-day realities and the representative character of the membership of the United Nations. In this connection, Myanmar fully supports the applications for Conference on Disarmament membership by Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.

Turning to our region, my delegation would like to express its deep appreciation of the important and useful role played by the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific in promoting a security dialogue among the Member States in the region on regional and global issues of arms control and disarmament. We applaud the Centre for successfully organizing regional disarmament conferences and seminars of high value and standard for the benefit of the Member States in the region. We fully support and strongly recommend the Centre's carrying on and expanding its activities in the fine tradition that it has established and maintained for more than a decade.

We have before us a very full and heavy agenda for arms control and disarmament. However, the question that we should not lose sight of and should give the highest priority to, is nuclear disarmament. We must therefore do our utmost to overcome the current impasse on this most crucial question.

The Chairman: I would like to remind the Committee that, in accordance with the Committee's decision, the list of speakers for the general debate on all disarmament and international security agenda items will be closed today at 6 p.m. I urge interested delegations to inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.